

ADJOURNMENT OF THE HOUSE

HON N.F. MOORE (Mining and Pastoral - Leader of the House) [10.00 pm]: I move -

That the House do now adjourn.

Contaminated Sites Legislation - Adjournment Debate

HON J.A. SCOTT (South Metropolitan) [10.00 pm]: I want to raise an issue of great concern that greeted people who read yesterday that the Minister for the Environment is proposing to dump contaminated sites legislation and legislation to amend the Environmental Protection Act. These pieces of legislation have been proposed for almost a decade, and there has been considerable consultation about this legislation at both a national and state level, with many people putting in a great deal of work to arrive at sensible legislation. However, it seems, particularly in the case of the contaminated sites legislation, that the minister is prepared to dump this legislation because she is more concerned about the rights of polluters than about the right of people to live in a clean environment or about the taxpayers who will have to pick up the bill for the clean-up of these contaminated sites. The delay in bringing in this legislation is providing a window of opportunity for some of the worst polluters to push their clean-up costs onto the taxpayers. Those clean-up costs are significant. The clean-up of the Omex site in Bellevue has cost taxpayers \$6m. We have 4 000 such sites in the State. If the average cost of cleaning up those sites were \$500 000, the total cost to the State would be \$2b; and if any of those sites were like the Omex site, the cost would be even higher.

I also need to mention some of the other costs that will be imposed on the community by the stalling of this legislation. Many people who live on or near these contaminated sites are suddenly finding that they cannot get reasonable prices for their homes when they wish to sell them; or in the case of people who live in Vela-Luka Park, the banks have told them that their homes have been valued downwards and their bank loans are at risk. Furthermore, these people are unable to get life insurance from insurance companies. These costs go beyond the direct cost of the clean-up of these sites. This Government seems to be protecting the polluters, because its delay in introducing the contaminated sites legislation is allowing service stations to do voluntary remediation of their site above the ground, after which they will be no longer labelled contaminated sites and the underground plumes will be left for the taxpayers to pay for later when the sites will need to be cleaned up. It is irresponsible of the minister to dump this legislation because of pressure from polluters. It is time the polluters were made to pay for these clean-ups.

A great deal of concern is also being expressed about the failure to make amendments to the Environmental Protection Act because of pressure from the Pastoralists and Graziers Association of Western Australia. I understand the PGA is concerned that if the concept of environmental harm were incorporated into the EP Act, it would have an impact on the ability of farmers to clear their land. It is all very well for the PGA to have that concern, but everyone in this House would be aware of the huge problem that we have in this State with salinity. It is time the Premier sat down with his brother Barry around that drum in the backyard that he talks about and had a man to man talk with him about the problems that are being caused by salinity. Salinity and land clearing are having not just an environmental impact on communities in Western Australia but also a huge economic and social impact, with some communities facing complete destruction. By delaying this legislation, the minister is, once again, failing to deal with an important issue.

It is interesting to note that when the Government wants to sell off community assets like Westrail or AlintaGas, or pass legislation to restrict the rights of persons to get workers compensation through the courts, the Government can act very quickly, but when it comes to the incredibly costly environmental harm that is being caused by pollution and salinity, the Government has done nothing. The Government has had seven years to do something about these matters. I believe the EP Act amendments were first talked about in 1991, before this Government came into power. The minister is showing absolutely no concern for these important issues. The minister should be condemned for caving in to vested interests who are prepared to push their costs onto taxpayers, both in the case of salinity and in the case of the clean-up of contaminated sites. I urge the minister to forget the handful of polluters and the pastoralists and graziers and get on with getting these Bills into Parliament and getting them passed so that the taxpayers do not need to foot the bills for these people and we will have a country that we can pass on to our children in the future.

Question put and passed.

House adjourned at 10.08 pm
